

Star pledges for youths

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If the future belongs to youth, then the future of Bangladesh also belongs to its youth; and therefore The Daily Star has decided to be with the young people of the country and promote what they are doing, he mentioned.

The programme was organised around the slogan, "41 years of independence, 21 years of independent journalism."

Since the beginning of its journey in 1991, the newspaper has been committed to taking the level of journalism to new heights. Though the odyssey has been rough, the effort has been worthwhile.

At yesterday's ceremony, The Daily Star editor introduced before the guests 16 young leaders striving to inspire others and bring about changes in their respective sectors.

The group included, among others, a social worker, entrepreneur, visual artist, mountaineer, youth activist, bright students.

"Bangladeshi art can take us to a global platform that other things cannot,"

observed Nazia Andaleeb Preema, a visual artist.

More focus is given on feeding the underprivileged children instead of on their long-term development and growth, said Korvi Rakshand, founder of JAAGO Foundation. The youth-based non-government organisation works to educate disadvantaged children.

"I want to open English medium schools in all the districts for deprived children," he mentioned.

Wasfia Nazreen, a woman mountaineer, said the world treats Bangladesh with apathy and cold glances, which she wants to change by climbing the highest summits of the seven continents, thus taking the country's name to the peaks.

Ivy Huq Russell, a social entrepreneur and founder of the women's healthcare website maya.com.bd, meanwhile, wants to bring about a change in women's healthcare and give access to information through her website.

Sharmeen Akter, a brilliant Dhaka University student of

biochemistry, has braved poverty and other odds to reach her present position. She told the guests at the reception that she wants to promote scientific research in the country, which she believes is the key to solving many problems.

Ejaz Ahmed, who graduated from Harvard University and returned home to found Bangladesh Youth Leadership Centre, said he had created the organisation to instil leadership in the young and inspire a new generation of leaders.

The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam urged the young people to follow in the footsteps of the youth who had joined the 1971 Liberation War, "not by waging a war, but by building the country."

Earlier, Rokia Afzal Rahman, chairperson of Media World, the owner organisation of the daily, welcomed everyone and sought their assistance in the days ahead.

A seven-minute mime show and a brief cultural programme were also staged at the ceremony.

Ctg judge mugged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A judge became the victim of muggers on Friday night in Chittagong. He was identified as Qazi Abdul Hasib Mohammed Sayeed, a joint district and sessions judge of Moulvibazar.

Police arrested Mohammed Ismail, 24, and Mohammed Mannan, 25 the same night.

The judge yesterday morning filed a case with Bakalia Police Station. Police produced the duo before the Chittagong judge's court and sought remand for seven days. The court may give verdict on the plea today, Officer-in-Charge Anwar Kamal said.

Mohammed Sayeed, who came to visit his relative's house in the port city, was obstructed by some miscreants at Mehediabag on Friday evening.

They took him forcibly to a house in Syed Shah Road area and released him at around 9:00pm after taking away Tk 29,230, a mobile phone set and a cheque book from his possession.

The victim informed the incident to Bakalia Police Station the same night.

Later, Panchlaish police detained the two alleged muggers from Chittagong Medical College Hospital gate, and recovered Tk 12,000 and the cheque book from them.

Mamata's

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"It seems that there is a deliberate and irresponsible move to keep the matter a secret. It was only when the level of the Bhagirathi river (in Murshidabad district) started falling that we realised something was amiss," Mamata wrote in a letter to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The contents of the letter were known yesterday.

"There is mischief afoot and a criminal conspiracy cannot be ruled out... It appears that Farakka Barrage water stock will continue to be depleted with the sole beneficiary being Bangladesh," she observed.

She said as per the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, Bangladesh is supposed to get 35,000 cusecs of water during the dry season, but it is getting 82,801 cusecs due to the drainage of water from the barrage.

According to officials, sluice gate number 13 of the barrage had broken on June 16 last year and gate number 16 on December 9.

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PM herself

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Minister Shahara Khatun yesterday, the eighth day since the incident took place.

"The prime minister herself is monitoring the case. Besides, the inspector general of police and I are also keeping watch," the home minister told reporters after inaugurating an outdoor shooting range at Mill Barrack Police Lines in the capital's Gendaria.

Asked, Shahara ruled out the allegation of any effort to cover-up the case and said, "There is no question of hiding anything about the case under anyone's pressure. As long as I am the home minister, none will be able to cover this case up and to my knowledge, no one is even trying to influence it."

Meanwhile, several journalist organisations, including Jatiya Press Club, Dhaka Reporters' Unity and two factions of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalist, yesterday jointly announced a rally in front of the national press club at 11:00am on February 22. Rallies will also be organised in different districts across the country same time, same day.

The decision came at a joint meeting where leaders of all the journalist bodies expressed grave concern over the delay in arresting the killers and unravelling the mystery.

Sagar Sarowar, news editor of private television station Maasranga, and his wife Meherun Runi, a senior reporter of another private television channel ATN Bangla, were killed early February 11 at their rented flat in the capital's West Rajabazar.



Criminals chop down and take away many tamarisk trees (jhaus) on the popular holiday destination Inani Beach in Cox's Bazar. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

2,000 jhaus trees

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yards north of Sonarpara was also visible there.

Locals say every day up to 30 people entered the grove and felled the trees. The same people took the logs and branches to nearby villages on pushcart vans or open jeeps in the early hours of the following days.

The locals allege though the range officer of the forest department was informed about the incident, he remained a silent spectator.

Asked about the matter, Range Officer Sunil Devnath said the trees could not be saved due to lack of manpower.

Sunil said a case will be filed against the miscreants after collecting particulars of

the persons involved in the tree felling.

During the visit, it was seen more than 500 illegal structures and shanties were erected on grabbed land by felling tamarisk trees in Himchhari, Inani, Sonarpara, Barochhara and other areas along the beach.

Forester Sunil said only two forest guards are posted to protect the tamarisk grove on about 15 acres of land. He added about 2 lakh trees were planted on the grove in 2001, but more than half of the trees have already disappeared.

He however claimed most of the trees were uprooted and washed away by the sea waves.

Divisional Forest Officer

of Cox's Bazar (South) Bipul Krishna Das has admitted that despite continuing patrol by foresters, miscreants are illegally felling trees at some points.

Environmentalists say in last one month more than 15,000 trees have been felled and removed from the groves along a 100km stretch of beach from Nazirtek to Teknaf.

As a result, coasts are going under the sea due to tidal surge and high tide and cracks are being developed at eight different spots in Kolatoli, Barochhara, Adarsha Gram, Himchhari along the Marine Drive road, said Ibrahim Khalil, general secretary of Cox's Bazar Forest and Environment Protection Council.

AL, BNP shift a little

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would not participate in any elections except under a caretaker government while AL insisted there was no scope for it after the constitutional amendment scrapped the system as per a Supreme Court verdict.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said on Thursday if AL agreed on forming a non-party government for holding the next elections, BNP was ready to join parliament session to discuss its formation and composition.

State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam has said, "Ice has started melting. They [BNP] were sticking to an extreme position, demanding elections under a caretaker government. But now they are speaking of an interim government."

It seems BNP has given up its demand for restoration of the caretaker government system, he said at a discussion on Friday at Dhaka Reporters' Unity.

On February 15, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert O Blake, who had talks with the chiefs of both AL and BNP, stressed the need for discussion

between the two parties in and outside parliament on the process of holding a free, fair and credible election.

In this context, both AL and BNP insiders said the two parties might now go for discussion between them, initially outside the House. And they would discuss the issue in the House after working out their respective "bottom lines" on it for averting political conflicts over the next parliamentary elections.

"The issue is at a stage of discussion and until now there has not been any decision," AL Presidium Member Obaidul Quader said on Friday. "There is still time to think on this issue. We want to know their [BNP] bottom line since they are shifting their stance on the issue of caretaker government."

Quader, also communications minister, said they want to ensure holding the next election in a credible manner with the participation of all political parties and on the basis of a consensus. But the opposition party must have to give up its negative attitude and refrain from saying no to everything.

The minister further said AL has no plan to go for

election alone. "We did not play any unfair game [in polls] in the past and will do the same in the future," said the ruling party policymaker.

On February 4, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said her party would not have any objection if the government installs a non-partisan administration by changing the name -- caretaker government. A number of opposition leaders also spoke similarly in the last few days.

On February 6, BNP standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan said they would accept renaming the caretaker government as interim government but nothing short of the "character of the non-party, neutral caretaker government".

On February 13, AL discussed the matter at its highest policymaking body and agreed in principle that it would urge BNP to place in parliament its proposal on interim government.

The meeting stressed that any discussion on the issue must be held in parliament.

The presidium meeting also decided to start a campaign in support of cancellation of the caretaker government system across the country.

Yunus banks on youths

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contributions to the Liberation War.

Yunus, founder of Grameen Bank, also shed light on the achievements from the Liberation War and the current situation.

He said, "Before 1971, all our potentials had been trapped under a cloak. The war blew off that cloak. And it did not happen on anyone's orders."

"After 40 years of independence, similar cloaks seem to have ensnared our potential for the coming days. The younger generation must remove the cloaks and tap the potential."

Yunus said, "The current stream of politics will come to an end in the next 20 years. I can guarantee it. The country will change automatically if the youths stand straight with their full inner vigour. They will have to lead the new stream."

Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury, executive director of Gonoshasthaya Kendra, said, "Muhammad Yunus too has responsibilities in changing the country's politics in future. Calling upon the younger generations is not enough; he [Yunus] has to lead. I will stand by him in his efforts toward change."

He urged the prime minister to take steps so that the Indian Border Security Force stops border killings in the next two years. "Realise a fair share of the Teesta waters and ensure healthcare for the people. You will be able to win the Nobel prize within two years."

Hossain Zillur Rahman, former adviser to a caretaker government, moderated the programme.

Brac chairman Fazle Hasan Abed, who was earlier scheduled to attend the open discussion on "Achievements of 40 Years of Independence, Challenges and Possibilities", stayed away due to illness.

Taking part in the discussion, Prof Yunus said, "Although a lot has been achieved in 40 years of independence, still many things have remained unachieved. The dreams

behind our joining the war of independence have largely faded away."

Emphasising the formation of Gram Sarkar in order to take Bangladesh forward in the next 10 years, Yunus said the local government system has been turned into a farce. "Bangladesh will move ahead a long way in 10-20 years by making the local government system powerful," he said.

Comparing the administrative structure to a car, he said the administration functions as per instructions of the politicians. "But the administration can't perform properly as politics has come into the administration. Politics is now also among university teachers and we are being stopped and interfered with everywhere due to weak politics."

At the beginning of the discussion, Hossain Zillur Rahman said that the largest achievement of the liberation war was the revolution of the personality.

He said there are many drivers behind the revolution of independence of Bangladesh, prominent among them are people like Muhammad Yunus, Fazle Hasan Abed and Zafarullah Chowdhury. They have contributed a lot in social and economic achievements, but not in the political arena.

Hossain Zillur said the 40 years of independence were the first round. Terming the next 10 years the second round, he said, "Many thought we would say something about it today. They have got some hints from the speech of Prof Yunus."

Those given reception included barrister Amir-Ul Islam, Maj (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, Shahidullah Khan, Kader Siddiqui, ASM Abdur Rob, Kazi Kamruzzaman, Shefali Bhoumik, Maj Gen (ret'd) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury and Maj Gen (ret'd) Maimuddin.

Leaders of Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party, Gono Forum, Workers Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Jote,

Bikalpadhara and Communist Party of Bangladesh are scheduled to take part in an open discussion at the re-union today.

Also today, Biranganas will be accorded a reception.

Timeline

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justice and perpetrators are not punished," he said while speaking at the inauguration of a workshop at the Judicial Administration Training Institute (JATI).

Around 100 public prosecutors attended the daylong training programme titled, "Workshop for Prosecutors on Addressing Violence against Women".

The judicial training institute organised the workshop in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

"The government is planning to amend the women and children repression prevention act to stipulate time limits for completing investigation, pressing charges, taking and cross-examining depositions and delivering verdicts," he said.

The minister urged all prosecutors to ensure that hearings on such cases were not adjourned without logical grounds.

Lawyers are the officers of court and they should present authentic information and relevant documents to get accurate verdicts, he said.

The government is also going to amend laws to ensure that all types of long-pending cases are disposed of through alternative dispute resolution outside courts.

State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam, Ashish Ranjan Das, law secretary (in-charge), and Anita A Davies, officer in charge of IOM Bangladesh, among others, spoke at the discussion presided over by JATI Director General Mafizul Islam.

Spelling Bee

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of class-VI came through as the last qualifier from the school.

"It feels awesome! I was not expecting to go through this round but now that I have, I am looking forward to the next round," said Bijoya ecstatically.

Meanwhile, Md Habibur Islam, Md Abidun Nur Tusher and Mahmudul Hasan Sohan, all of class-IX, crossed the first-round hurdle from Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Govt Boys High School yesterday.

At least 500 students will qualify through the second round from Dhaka division. Those who are yet to qualify can log on to www.champs21.com and take part in the Spelling Bee contest and try their luck. The top spellers from online will also qualify through the second round.

Awards

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Ashim Shaha and Kamal Chowdhury for poetry, Anisul Hoque for literature (Katha Sahitya), Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed for essay, Prof Biswajit Ghosh for research, Prof Khaliuzzaman Ilias for translation, Belal Mohammad for literature on liberation war affairs, Dr Baren Chakrabarti for travel story, Dr Ali Ajjar for science, technology and environment and Akhter Hossain for child literature.

The academy, however, could not consider anyone in the drama category.

Each of the winners will receive a cash award of Tk 1 lakh, a certificate and a crest at a ceremony on February 24.

In his reaction on winning the award, famed novelist Anisul Hoque said, "I am happy to win the prize alongside Abdullah Abu Sayeed and my teacher Ali Ajjar. This will of course inspire me to do even better in future."

"Achieving an award is always a great feeling. It will certainly make me more responsible to my work. I will try to preserve the dignity of this award," awardee Biswajit Ghosh, a teacher at Department of Bengali of Dhaka University, told The Daily Star.

THE FAIR
A total of 136 new books were published yesterday as the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela witnessed a fewer visitors than Friday.

The fair remained open from 11:00am to 9:00pm. A lot of students in uniform drew the attention of the visitors.

About 200 students of Shamoly Medical Assistant Training School visited the book fair, said a student Jewel Islam Jony.

Around the same number of students came from Trauma Institute of Medical Technology and Trauma Medical Assistant Training School, he added.

Bibliophiles, however, had to suffer due to dust at the fair premises.

A discussion was held in the evening followed by a cultural function.

Rejected then, reviewed now

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given by Sir Ninian Stephen.

Sir Ninian came to Dhaka in October that year as a special envoy from the then Commonwealth secretary general to break a political impasse between the then ruling BNP and the AL-led opposition over introduction of a caretaker government system.

According to his formula, an 11-member cabinet would be formed with the incumbent prime minister in chair. Five cabinet members would be from the ruling and five others from the opposition parties. And the interim cabinet would give all-out support to the Election Commission for holding free and fair parliamentary polls.

Many ruling party leaders were about to agree on the formula to overcome the crisis. But the opposition parties, including Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami, outright rejected it and continued agitation for introduction of the caretaker government system.

The efforts of Sir Ninian along with some eminent citizens and diplomats failed to break the deadlock. And 147 opposition lawmakers resigned from parliament on December 28, 1994, to gear up for anti-government movement.

The result was the farcical polls on February 15, 1996, to constitute the sixth parliament that introduced the caretaker government system in haste by amending the constitution. The caretaker government assumed office at the end of March. The seventh parliamentary election was held on June 12, 1996.

The provision for the caretaker government system was abolished in June last year by the AL-led government, clearing the way for its staying in office during the next parliamentary polls. The cancellation, however, prompted the BNP-led opposition to take to streets to get the system restored.

But the ruling AL and government seem to have vowed not to give in to the opposition's demand. Rather, some recent newspaper reports on a proposition being discussed among the government policymakers over formation of an interim government. The incumbent PM will lead that interim government comprised of

elector representatives of both ruling and opposition parties.

The proposition, although yet to be made public officially, is almost same as Sir Ninian's formula. And, the reaction of the BNP-led opposition is same as the then AL-led opposition's in 1994. The BNP-led opposition maintains the incumbent PM must resign to clear the way for forming a non-partisan government.

More interestingly, if one goes through the speeches of incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the then PM Khaleda in 1994 will find resemblance. For instance, Khaleda, then PM, on October 1, 1994 at a public rally on the capital's Manik Mia Avenue said the parliamentary polls would have to be held under a democratic government. She also urged the opposition to return to parliament, saying it was possible to resolve all problems in the House.

When AL-led opposition parties were agitating for reforms in the caretaker system and electoral laws between 2005 and 2006, the then PM Khaleda and her other colleagues also urged the opposition to return to parliament and place reform proposals.

Awami League did not return to parliament in 1994. But it responded to the government call and joined the parliament session on February 12, 2006 after remaining absent for 17 months in a row and placed a set of proposals for electoral reforms.

But the political crisis over electoral reforms was not resolved as the government did not show sincerity. Rather, it became more volatile at the end of 2006.

Finally, amid a grave political situation, the president declared the state of emergency on January 11, 2007.

Now, PM Hasina seems to have opted for the political weapons earlier used by Khaleda against her. Hasina and some of her cabinet and party colleagues have been urging BNP to attend parliament sessions and place their proposals, if they have any, over the caretaker government system.

In response, the BNP-led opposition MPs might join the current session of parliament to place its proposals for restoration of the care-

taker government. In that case, the opposition could join the House before its March 12 "March towards Dhaka" programme. If they do so, the role of the ruling party will mostly determine the next course of politics.

Considering the political reality and polls records, the opposition's stance seems stronger than the government's. It has already been evident that free and fair parliamentary polls were possible under the caretaker government. The four general elections overseen by non-party caretaker administrations since 1991 were largely free and fair.

But there is no evidence that free and fair general elections are possible under a partisan government. In the past, the ruling party men's unbridled greed to win the polls anyhow destroyed people's confidence in the partisan government's assurance of not to influence the polls if it remains in power.

2 killed

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fatally hit him around 3:00pm.

Son of a rickshaw-van puller Hossain Ahmed, Rakib was declared dead by on duty doctors at Dhaka Medical College Hospital after the locals took him there around 4:00pm.

The victim's family sources said the kid was crossing the road near their residence holding his sister's hand. But as the pick-up van came closer, Rakib detached himself from his sister and ran out in fear. The van hit him and immediately fled the scene.

Officer-in-Charge Rafiqul Islam of Hazaribagh Police Station said a case was filed in this connection.

Meanwhile, a truck driver, who was injured in a head-on collision with a bus at Uttara Beribandh of Abdullahpur, died around 6:00am yesterday at a Tongi hospital.

The victim was identified as Saidur Rahman, 30.

The bus driver was also injured. There was, however, no passenger on the bus.

Khandker Rezaul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Uttara Police Station, said Saidur was going to Ashulia from Tongi with his empty truck when the accident took place.

Police seized both the vehicles from the spot, he said.